



## A Little Peafowl History

For thousands of years, peacocks have been prized and distributed throughout the world as ornamental birds. It is believed that it was the Phoenicians who first transported peafowl from their native habitat, presenting them to the pharaohs of Egypt. Alexander the Great is credited with bringing them to Greece. Romans carried them throughout their extensive empire. By the 14th Century peafowl existed in many parts of Europe, including France, Germany and England. They were often a symbol of wealth and prestige.

## Peacocks at Leo Carrillo Ranch

Here at Carrillo Ranch, and for the most part in this country, peafowl have been enjoyed for decades as an ornamental bird. Some people come to visit...not particularly for the rich California history here, nor know of Leo Carrillo and his long career spanning stage, movies, and television, not even for the magnificent botanical variety at the ranch... but to see the peacocks. And from his writings, Leo Carrillo would probably have liked that!

*Thank you for not feeding our peacocks.*

*"I love the sight of the peacocks. We started out with six and now there are nearly two dozen roaming the place, the males spreading their tremendous feathered tails with the springtime urge and strutting for the benefit of the females who sometimes don't pay much attention. The peacocks fancy they are glamour boys, and are stuck on themselves. I have even put out mirrors in the springtime so they could admire their own images, and this seemed to help satisfy their vanity. Peacocks at some seasons of the year make a good deal of noise but the rest of the time they are so beautiful and ornamental and relatively quiet that we are willing to put up with the cries for a little while just to have the benefit of their beauty the rest of the year."*

~Leo Carrillo, from his book,  
The California I Love



**Leo Carrillo Ranch Historic Park**  
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[www.LeoCarrilloRanch.org](http://www.LeoCarrilloRanch.org)

For other educational activities, classes and events, visit: [www.CarlsbadConnect.org](http://www.CarlsbadConnect.org)



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## The Peacocks of Leo Carrillo Ranch

*In creating a rancho reminiscent of his childhood and Spanish California heritage, Leo Carrillo fondly remembered peacocks wandering freely on his tio's, or uncle's, ranch. He wanted to include these beautiful birds on his own ranch, so he started his peafowl collection with only six birds. The descendents of these birds, after over sixty years, are the ones you see today. The population has varied over time, but now there are about two dozen peafowl living at Carrillo Ranch.*



## Peafowl 101

Although commonly called peacocks, the proper term for these birds is peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), where peacocks are the colorful iridescent blue males, and females with the more natural-toned feathers are peahens. Peafowl are the largest of the family of birds that includes pheasants, turkeys, and chickens (Phasianidae). If you were referring to a group of peafowl, you would not call it a flock, but a muster or ostentation. Peafowl are native to India, Ceylon, Southeast Asia, and the Congo. Despite their natural habitat being primarily deciduous rainforest, they have adapted well to different habitats all over the world. The peafowl of Carrillo Ranch are of the Indian variety.

Peacocks have a distinctive loud call usually heard during the mating season and when alarmed. It sounds like a cross between a cat's meow and a baby's cry.

Males display their long feather train by raising it into the characteristic fan shape. This is a courting behavior; however, they seem to be proud to present this impressive display to anyone who will appreciate it.

Surprisingly, the peacock's long feather train does not interfere with its flight. The beautiful feathers of the male's fantail, looking like a hundred open eyes, are dropped every year after mating season, and they begin growing back a new set for the next year soon afterward. These birds do not pair up, and the males will mate with a number of females during the season to ensure strong, healthy offspring.

A peahen commonly lays between 6 and 15 eggs in a clutch and often has two clutches in a breeding season. The incubation period for the eggs is about a month. Once the first eggs of a clutch hatch, the mother will often tend to these chicks and may neglect the rest of the eggs.

Here at Carrillo Ranch, eggs and young chicks are the most vulnerable to predation. Predators include coyotes, foxes, raccoons, weasels, rodents, domestic animals, hawks, owls, and other predatory birds. Generally, peafowl roost in trees keeping them relatively safe from predators, but the peahen builds her nest on the ground and stays with her chicks until they are old enough to fly into the trees.



## Our Lone White Peacock

During the 2004 breeding season, one of our Carrillo Ranch peahens had a clutch that included one all-white baby chick, the others being of typical coloration. This variation occurs in peafowl rarely but with some regular frequency and is due to a recessive gene responsible for pigmentation. This bird's plumage will remain all white through its entire life, and he will present a beautiful and distinctive courting display when mature. Because this peacock is unique here at the ranch, it does seem to be getting a bit more attention than the others!

